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SUBJECT: COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM - AFGHANISTAN

AFGHANISTAN

1. (SBU) In 2005, Afghanistan continued its progress toward building a democratic government. The 2004 Presidential elections were followed by national assembly and provincial council elections in September 2005. In spite of Taliban threats to disrupt the democratic process, only minor incidents occurred and the results were accepted as legitimate by the Afghan people. The National Assembly will be inaugurated on December 19, marking the final milestone of the Bonn Process.

2. (SBU) Programs designed to combat terrorism and lawlessness have continued. The Program for Strengthening Peace (PTS), which reconciles former Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) members, founded six regional offices and reported that over 800 former fighters had joined the program, as of December 2005. The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program has processed over 63,000 former combatants. The Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) process began work in June, focusing on vetting parliamentary candidates to ensure they had no ties to illegal armed groups (IAGs). The DIAG disqualified a number of candidates, but the process fell short of winnowing out every candidate with such ties. The GOA likely wanted to use the process to push compliance rather than punishing individuals for their past (and present) actions. The programs next phase will be a province-by-province effort to disband the most notorious IAGs, but progress has been slowed by the search for a successor to the Afghan head of the program, who left his post in October, and to an apparent lack of political will to seriously confront the commanders.

3. (SBU) Increasingly, the Afghan National Army (ANA), with over 26,000 personnel in its ranks, and the Afghan National Police (ANP), with 54,500, have taken the lead in anti-terrorism operations. Proactive arrests of terrorists have also continued, thwarting bombings in Kabul and the rest of the country.

4. (SBU) In spite of this progress, Afghanistan saw an increasing number of violent incidents in 2005, compared with 2004. Over 1500 people were killed in violent attacks this year, many of them a result of tribal, criminal, an especially narcotics-related activity rather than of terrorism. Al Qaida and the Taliban frequently claim responsibility for attacks but their claims are unverifiable and sometimes contradictory.

5. (SBU) There has been a clear increase in the number of suicide bombings in Afghanistan over the last year. There were an estimated 15 suicide attacks, compared to only four in 2004. It is unclear if these bombers were Afghans or foreigners. What is clear is the increase in sophistication of these attacks when compared with previous suicide operations conducted in Afghanistan. While there are no indications Anti-Government Elements (AGE) are directly using lessons learned in Iraq, there does appear to be a desire to replicate some of those operations. A similar pattern is seen in the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), which have increased dramatically in frequency and sophistication in 2005. This may reflect the desire of AGEs to move away from direct fire attacks against Coalition forces, thus avoiding high casualties.

6. (SBU) In addition to their attacks on ISAF and Coalition forces, suspected terrorists and anti-coalition forces targeted candidates and election workers in the run up to the parliamentary elections. International NGO and U.N. workers have also been a focus of violence, as well as, in some areas, recipients of NGO assistance, in an attempt to hamper

reconstruction efforts and drive the international assistance community out of Afghanistan. Thirty-three NGO staff members were killed in 2005, up from 23 in 2004 and 12 in 2003. This is in contrast to overall attacks against noncombatants, which appear to have significantly decreased since 2004.

NEUMANN